

AGENTS OF THE DARK

From 'The Unexplained' No. 39.

Rarely - if ever - do the threats of the mysterious Men In Black, following a close encounter, come to anything. So what could be the purpose behind their visits?

In September 1976, Dr Herbert Hopkins, a 58 year-old doctor and hypnotist, was acting as consultant on an alleged UFO teleportation case in Maine, USA. One evening, when his wife and children had gone out leaving him alone, the telephone rang and a man identifying himself as vice-president of the New Jersey UFO Research Organisation asked if he might visit Dr Hopkins that evening to discuss certain details of the case. Dr Hopkins agreed; at the time, it seemed the natural thing to do. He went to the back door to switch on the light so that his visitor would be able to find his way from the parking lot, but while he was there, he noticed the man already climbing the porch steps. "I saw no car, and even if he did have a car, he could not have possibly gotten to my house that quickly from any phone," Hopkins later commented in delayed astonishment.

At the time, Dr Hopkins felt no particular surprise as he admitted his visitor, The man was dressed in a black suit, with black hat, tie and shoes, and a white shirt, "I thought, he looks like an undertaker," Hopkins later said. His clothes were immaculate - suit unwrinkled, trousers sharply creased. When he took off his hat, he revealed himself as completely hairless, not only bald but without eyebrows or eyelashes. His skin was dead white, his lips bright red. In the course of their conversation, he happened to brush his lips with his grey suede gloves, and the doctor was astonished to see that his lips were smeared and that the gloves were stained with lipstick!

It was only afterwards, however, that Dr Hopkins reflected further on the strangeness of his visitor's appearance and behaviour. Particularly odd was the fact that his visitor stated that his host had two coins in his pocket. It was indeed the case. He then asked the doctor to put one of the coins in his hand and to watch the coin, not himself. As Hopkins watched, the coin seemed to go out of focus, and then gradually vanished. "Neither you nor anyone else on this plane will ever see that coin again," the visitor told him. After talking a little while longer on general UFO topics, Dr Hopkins suddenly noticed that the visitor's speech was slowing down. The man then rose unsteadily to his feet and said, very slowly; "My energy is running low - must go now - goodbye." He walked falteringly to the door and descended the outside steps uncertainly, one at a time. Dr Hopkins saw a bright light shining in the driveway, bluish-white and distinctly brighter than a normal car lamp. At the time, however, he assumed it must be the stranger's car, although he neither saw nor heard it.

MYSTERIOUS MARKS

Later, when Dr Hopkins family had returned, they examined the driveway and found marks that could not have been made by a car because they were in the centre of the driveway, where the wheels could not have been. But the next day, although the driveway had not been used in the meantime, the marks had vanished.

Dr Hopkins was very much shaken by the visit, particularly when he reflected on the extraordinary character of the stranger's conduct. Not surprisingly, he was so scared that he willingly complied with his visitor's instruction, which was to erase the tapes of the hypnotic sessions he was conducting with regard to his current case, and to have nothing further to do with the investigation.

Subsequently, curious incidents continued to occur both in Dr Hopkin's household and in that of his eldest son. He presumed that there was some link with the extraordinary visit, but he never heard from his visitor again. As for the New Jersey UFO Research Organisation, no such institution exists.

Dr Hopkins' account is probably the most detailed we have of a MIB (Man in Black) visit, and confronts us with the problem at its most bizarre. First we must ask ourselves if a trained and respected doctor would invent so strange a tale, and if so, with what conceivable motive? Alternatively, could the entire episode have been a delusion, despite the tracks seen by other members of his family? Could the truth lie somewhere between reality and imagination? Could a real visitor, albeit an impostor making a false identity claim, have visited the doctor for some unknown reason of his own, somehow acting as a trigger for the doctor to invent a whole set of weird features?

In fact, what seems the LEAST likely explanation is that the whole incident took place in the doctor's imagination. When his wife and children came home, they found him severely shaken, with the house lights blazing, and seated at a table on which lay a gun. They confirmed the marks on the driveway and a series of disturbances to the telephone that seemed to commence immediately after the visit. So it would seem that some real event occurred, although its nature remains mystifying.

The concrete nature of the phenomenon was accepted by the United States Air Force, who were concerned that persons passing themselves off as USAF personnel should be visiting UFO witnesses. In February 1967, Colonel George P. Freeman, Pentagon spokesman for the USAF's Project Blue Book, told UFO investigator John Keel in the course of an interview:

"Mysterious men dressed in Air Force uniforms or bearing impressive credentials from government agencies have been silencing UFO witnesses. We have checked a number of these cases, and these men are not connected with the Air Force in any way. We haven't been able to find out anything about these men. By posing as Air Force officers and government agents, they are committing a federal offence. We would sure like to catch one. Unfortunately the trail is always too cold by the time we hear about these cases. But we are still trying."

But were the impostors referred to by Colonel Freeman, and Dr

Hopkin's strange visitor similar in kind? UFO sightings, like sensational crimes, attract a number of mentally unstable persons, who are quite capable of posing as authorised officials in order to gain access to witnesses; and it could be that some supposed MIBs are simply pseudo-investigators of this sort.

One particularly curious recurrent feature of MIB reports is the ineptitude of the visitors. Time and again, they are described as incompetent; and if they are impersonating human beings, they certainly do not do it very well, arousing their victims' suspicions by improbable behaviour, by the way they look or talk, and by their ignorance as much as their knowledge. But, of course, it could be that the only ones who are spotted as impostors are those who are no good at their job, and so there may be many more MIB cases that we never learn about simply because the visitors successfully convince their victims that there is nothing to be suspicious about, or that they should keep quiet about the visit.

UNFULFILLED THREATS

A common feature of a great many MIB visits is indeed the instruction to a witness not to say anything about the visit, and to cease all activity concerning the case. (Clearly, we know of these cases only because such instructions have been disobeyed.) One Canadian UFO witness was told by a mysterious visitor in 1976 to stop repeating his story and not to go further into his case, or he would be visited by three men in black. "I said, 'What's that supposed to mean?' 'Well,' he said, 'I could make it hot for you... it might cost you certain injury.'" A year earlier, Mexican witness Carlos de los Santos had been stopped on his way to a television interview by two large black limousines. One of the occupants - dressed in a black suit and 'Scandinavian' in appearance - told him: "Look, boy, if you value your life and your family's too, don't talk any more about this sighting of yours."

However, there is no reliable instance of such threats ever having been carried out, though a good many witnesses have gone ahead and defied their warnings. Indeed, sinister though the MIBs may be, they are notable for their lack of actual violence. The worst that can be said of them is that they frequently harass witnesses with untimely visits and telephone calls, or simply disturb them with their very presence.

While, for the victim, it is just as well that the threats of violence are not followed through, this is for the investigator one more disconcerting aspect of the phenomenon - for violence, if it resulted in physical action, would at least help in establishing the reality of the phenomenon. Instead, it remains a fact that most of the evidence is purely hearsay in character and often not of the highest quality; cases as well-attested as that of Dr. Herbert Hopkins are unfortunately in the minority.

Another problem area is the dismaying lack of precision about many of the reports. Popular American writer Brad Steiger

alleged that hundreds of ufologists, contactees and chance percipients of UFOs claim to have been visited by ominous strangers - usually three, and usually dressed in black; but he cites only a few actual instances. Similarly, John Keel, an expert on unexplained phenomena, claimed that, on a number of occasions, he actually saw phantom Cadillacs, complete with rather sinister Oriental-looking passengers in black suits; but for a trained reporter, he showed a curious reluctance to pursue these sightings or to give chapter and verse in such an important matter. Such loose assertions are valueless as evidence; all they do is contribute to the myth.

And so we come back once again to the possibility that there is nothing more to the phenomenon than myth. Should we perhaps write off the whole business as delusion, the creation of imaginative folk whose personal obsessions take on this particular shape because it reflects one or other of the prevalent cultural preoccupations of our time? At one end of the scale, we find contactee Woodrow Derenberger insisting that the "two men dressed entirely in black" who tried to silence him were emissaries of the Mafia; while at the other, there is theorist David Tansley, who suggested that they are psychic entities, representatives of the dark forces, seeking to prevent the spread of true knowledge. More matter-of-factly, Dominick Lucchesi claimed that they emanated from some unknown civilisation, possibly underground, in a remote area of Earth - the Amazon, the Gobi Desert or the Himalayas.

But there is one feature that is common to virtually all MIB reports, and that perhaps contains the key to the problem. This is the possession, by the MIBs, of information that they should not have been able to come by - information that was restricted, not released to the press, known perhaps to a few investigators and officials but not to the public, and sometimes not even to them. The one person who does possess that knowledge is always the person visited. In other words, the MIBs and their victims share knowledge that perhaps nobody else possesses. Add to this the fact that, in almost every case, the MIBs appear to the witness when he or she is alone - in Dr Hopkin's case, for example, the visitor took care to call when his wife and children were away from home, and established this fact by telephone beforehand - and the implication has to be that some kind of paranormal link connects the MIBs and the persons they visit.

TRUTH - OR PARANOIA?

To this must be added other features of the phenomenon that are not easily reconciled with everyday reality. Where are the notorious black cars, for instance, when they are not visiting witnesses? Where are they garaged or serviced? Do they never get involved in breakdowns or accidents? Can it be that they materialise from some other plane of existence when they are needed?

These are only a few of the questions raised by the MIB phenomenon. What complicates the matter is that MIB cases lie

along a continuous spectrum ranging from the easily believable to the totally incredible. At one extreme are visits during which nothing really bizarre occurs, the only anomalous feature being, perhaps, that the visitor makes a false identity claim, or has unaccountable access to private information. At the other extreme are cases in which the only explanation would seem to be that the witness has succumbed to paranoia. In "The Truth About the Men In Black", UFO investigator Ramona Clark tells of an unnamed investigator who was confronted by three MIBs on 3 July 1969. "On the window of the car in which they were riding was the symbol connected with them and their visitations. This symbol had a profound psychological impact upon this man. I have never encountered such absolute fear in a human being."

The first meeting was followed by continual harassment. There were mysterious telephone calls, and the man's house was searched. He began to hear voices and to see strange shapes. "Black Cadillacs roamed the street in front of his home, and followed him everywhere he went. Once he and his family were almost forced into an accident by an oncoming Cadillac. Nightmares concerning MIBs plagued his sleep. It became impossible for him to rest, his work suffered and he was scared of losing his job."

Was it all in his mind? One is tempted to think so. But a friend confirmed that, while they talked, there was a strange-looking man walking back and forth in front of the house. The man was tall, seemed about 55 years old - and was dressed entirely in black.

CASEBOOK

The Odd Couple.

On 24 September 1976 - only a few days after Dr. Herbert Hopkin's terrifying visit from a MIB - his daughter-in-law Maureen received a telephone call from a man who claimed to know her husband John, and who asked if he and a companion could come and visit them.

John met the man at a local fast-food restaurant, and brought him home with his companion, a woman. Both appeared to be in their mid-thirties, and wore curiously old-fashioned clothes. The woman looked particularly odd; when she stood up, it seemed that there was something wrong with the way that her legs joined her hips. Both strangers walked with very short steps, leaning forward as though frightened of falling.

They sat awkwardly together on a sofa while the man asked a number of detailed personal questions. Did John and Maureen watch television much? What did they read? And what did they talk about? All the while, the man was pawing and fondling his female companion, asking John if this was all right and whether he was doing it correctly.

John left the room for a moment, and the man tried to persuade Maureen to sit next to him. He also asked her "how she was made", and whether she had any nude photographs.

Shortly afterwards, the woman stood up and announced that she wanted to leave. The man also stood, but made no move to go. He was between the woman and the door, and it seemed that the only way she could get to the door was by walking in a straight line, directly through him. Finally the woman turned to John and asked: "Please move him; I can't move him myself." Then, suddenly, the man left, followed by the woman, both walking in straight lines. They did not even say goodbye.

End